

Jerusalem Perspective

A Monthly Report on Research into the Words of Jesus

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Jesus' Education - part 1

A careful reading of the New Testament suggests that Jesus was a scholar learned in the Scriptures and religious literature of the period, which was vast and varied. Yet the popular view of Jesus is that he was a simple, uneducated character from the provinces.

This misunderstanding is due in part to a number of disparaging statements made about Nazareth and the Galilee such as, "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" (John 1:46), and "Utterly amazed, they asked: 'Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans?'" (Acts 2:7).

These statements may reflect a Judean bias against Galileans.

Some Judeans may have seen themselves as cultured and cosmopolitan. To them, the Galileans were provincials whose accent seemed coarse and unrefined.

Actually, however, the reverse may have been true: the Galileans were the more exposed to the outside world while the Judeans, living in the interior of the land, were partially sheltered from contact with foreign nations. The Galilee also was more urban, with many developed villages. Judea, by contrast, was generally more rural in character.

No doubt this same disdain toward Galileans prompted the assumption, preserved in John 7:15,

that Jesus had no education: "The Jews were amazed and asked, 'How did this man get such learning without having studied?'"

Conservative Galileans

Such passages have given rise to the idea that Jesus and his disciples were uneducated simply because they came from Galilee. Surprisingly, however, the standard of education and religious training in Galilee surpassed that of Judea.

According to Shmuel Safrai, Hebrew University Professor of Jewish History of the Mishnaic and Talmudic Periods, not only do the number of first-century Galilean sages exceed the number of Judean

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עֲשֵׂה רְצוֹנְךָ בְּשָׁמַיִם וּבָאָרֶץ Thy Will Be Done

by Bradford Young

We noted in a previous article that "Thy will be done" parallels "Thy Kingdom come." Both phrases mean "May you continue establishing your Kingship." Jesus does not instruct his disciples to pray "if it is your will." It is within God's purpose that all men should repent and become a part of God's reign. "May your will be accomplished" is a strong affirmative appeal.

"Let It Be Done"

The key to understanding this petition in Matthew 6:10 is the

Greek word γενήθῃτω (*genetheto*), translated "be done." This word literally means "let it be" or "let it come about," and can best be translated to Hebrew by יֵעָשֶׂה (*ye-'a-SEH*, let it be done). The most literal Hebrew translation of this entreaty would employ the verb יָהָה (*ha-YAH*, to be) and be rendered "Let it be your will in heaven and on earth," or "Let your will prevail in heaven and on earth." However, the context of the prayer makes this translation somewhat awkward, and we must keep in mind that the most

literal reconstruction is not always the most reliable.

Hebrew prayers containing the verb "to be" usually use it in the expression יְיָ רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ (*ye-HI ra-TSON mil-fa-NE-ka*, May it be pleasing to you), followed by a request. Here, however, no request is made. Only the words "in heaven and on earth" appear.

That the correct translation is "let it be done" rather than "let it be" is further strengthened by the fact that "to do his will" is idiomatic in Hebrew. The wish for God's will to be accomplished in heaven and earth seems to be connected to the desire that everyone should repent and obey God.

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Rabbinic Illumination

A prayer which was given by Rabbi Eliezer in about 100 A.D. illuminates Jesus' entreaty. As in the prayer Jesus taught his disciples, Eliezer's prayer requested that God's will be accomplished. It is a traveler's prayer, especially designed for someone who is traveling through a dangerous area. In ancient times, travel was much more dangerous than today, and a person passing through an area infested with robbers needed a brief prayer. Rabbi Eliezer taught the following petition:

Let Your will be done in heaven above, grant peace of mind to those who fear You below, and do what is good in Your eyes. Blessed is He who hears prayer. (Tosefta Berachot 3:7; Berachot 29b)

Here too, the Hebrew verb *עשה* ('a-SAH, to do) is used. As in the Lord's Prayer, Eliezer calls on God to perform his will on earth.

Eliezer's doublet "above...below" is paralleled by "in heaven...on earth" in the prayer of Jesus. The original Hebrew phrase in this line of Jesus' prayer was probably *בשמים ובארץ* (*ba-sha-MA-yim u-va-'A-rets*, in heaven and on earth), a vintage Hebrew idiom (compare Joel 2:30; Psalm 113:6).

The common English version of this line is "on earth as it is in heaven" (the Greek reads literally,

"as in heaven also on earth"). However, in several New Testament manuscripts the Greek word *ὡς* (*hos*, as, like) does not appear. One of these is Codex Bezae, thought by many scholars to preserve Semitisms better than other textual witnesses. Therefore *hos* may be a scribal addition due to the influence of "as we also have forgiven" in Matthew 6:12.

The Hebrew imagery behind the phrase "in heaven and on earth" suggests God's majesty and his involvement with mankind. He is supernatural and all-powerful in heaven, and yet he is active in the affairs of men on earth. The supernatural and the natural are combined, and almighty God himself intervenes on behalf of men and for his Kingdom on earth.

Accomplishing

The supplication "May your will be done" has more to do with accomplishing God's will than it does with merely discerning his will. Scriptural injunctions generally concern doing rather than discerning God's will. The Psalmist wrote, "To do your will, O my God, is my desire. Your Torah is in my inmost parts" (Psalm 40:8). The Torah, God's instruction, makes God's will clear. The Psalmist's desire was to do the will of God as it is taught in God's Torah.

Rabbinic teachings concerning doing the will of God are similar. A saying of Rabban Gamaliel (circa 220 A.D.) emphasizes the need for a man to place God's will before his own desires: "He used to say, 'Do His will as though it were your will'" (Avot 2:4).

The greatest example of the desire to place God's will before one's own is Jesus' trial in Gethsemane. Jesus was aware of what lay ahead of him. He had already predicted his disciples' betrayal and his agonizing death at the hands of the Romans. The brutality of Roman executions was well known, and more than a few people had actually witnessed a crucifixion. Still, conscious of his own crucifixion looming be-

fore him in the next hours, he prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). Jesus overruled his own volition and did not succumb to his fears, but determined to perform God's will.

Overcoming

Man's evil desires can prevent him from performing God's will. A prayer by Rabbi Alexandri expresses this:

Sovereign of the universe, it is well known to you that our will is to do your will. [But] what prevents us? The yeast in the dough and [our] enslavement to other kingdoms. May it be your will to save us from them so that we can once more fully perform the statutes of your will. (Berachot 17a)

The expression "yeast in the dough" refers to man's evil inclination or his sinful nature. This propensity for sin stands between man and his desire to do the will of God. "Enslavement to other kingdoms" is a reference to the many sufferings of the people of Israel at the hands of ruling authorities who would not let them live according to the precepts of the Jewish faith.

"May your will be done" is a powerful plea. It expresses a disciple's intense yearning that God accomplish his will on earth. While this is not identical with the idea that a man must overcome his own will in order to do God's will, the two ideas are very closely related.

God's will is known from Scripture. Jesus taught that a man must repent and overcome his natural tendency to rebel against God's authority. This theme is emphasized in the remainder of the Lord's Prayer: each man is required to forgive like God himself forgives; further, the disciple desires to avoid temptation and to be delivered from the power of evil.

This article is condensed from Dr. Young's *The Jewish Background to the Lord's Prayer*, published by the Center for Judaic-Christian Studies (\$4.95 ppd.), P.O. Box 293040, Dayton, OH 45429, U.S.A.

Jerusalem Perspective

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The third letter in מְנָחָה (*me-no-RAH*), the first letter of its third syllable, is ר (*resh*). The Hebrew alphabet has twenty-two letters, and *resh* is the twentieth. In the system of transliteration used in JERUSALEM PERSPECTIVE, the *resh* is represented by “r.”

resh was the ancient Semitic word meaning “head.” When alphabetical writing developed, the pictograph ר (*resh*) was chosen to represent the “r” sound. The *resh* gradually lost its face as it evolved into the form used today in modern Hebrew.

Under the ר of מְנָחָה is the vowel symbol , (ka-MATS), which is pronounced as the “a” in “father.” It was first introduced in Lesson Eight under the second letter, ב (*bet*), of the word אָבָא (*ʾa-BAʾ*).

The final letter in מְנָחָה is ה (*heʾ*). As we remarked in Lesson Eleven, *heʾ*, like the English “h,” is very difficult to pronounce at the end of a word. It is silent in that position unless it has a *ma-PIK*.

Summary

We now have learned all the elements in מְנָחָה. Altogether, the words מְנָחָה, אָבָא, וְלֵלִיָּהּ, and מְנָחָה have taught us ten consonants and six vowel symbols. This is exactly half of the vowel symbols and almost half of the Hebrew alphabet’s twenty-two consonants. We don’t have far to go before we will be able to read every word in the Hebrew Scriptures or in any other vowel-pointed text.

We also have learned that the *shin* is pronounced “sh” when there is a dot at its upper right-hand corner (שׁ), but “s” when the dot is at the upper left-hand corner (שׂ). We likewise have learned two different

Hebrew Nuggets

pronunciations of the *bet* — “b” when it has a dot in its center (בּ), and “v” when there is no dot (ב).

Lesson Fourteen ר — מְנָחָה: *resh*

In this lesson we introduce the final letter of the Hebrew word מְנָחָה. This new letter, together with the letters and vowel symbols we have learned over the past thirteen lessons, give us the ability to read a large number of Hebrew words. The second half of this lesson therefore offers reading practice in which we make use of the consonants and vowels we have learned.

Reading Practice

What we have learned thus far allows us to read many other words. All of the following words contain our latest acquisition, the letter *resh*:

• נֵר (*ner*), “oil lamp” (in modern Hebrew also the word for wax candle). Its plural form is נֵרוֹת (*ne-ROT*). The מְנָחָה served as a stand for a נֵר or נֵרוֹת — “One doesn’t light a נֵר and then cover it. One places it on a מְנָחָה so that it can give light to all the members of the household” (Matthew 5:15).

• מָר (*mar*), “bitter.” This is the masculine form of the adjective. Its feminine form is מְרָה (*ma-RAH*). Remember Naomi’s words, “Don’t call me Naomi [pleasant, sweet], call me instead Marah, for Shaddai has made my life very bitter” (Ruth 1:20).

• מוֹרָא (*mo-RAʾ*), “awe, dread.” מוֹרָא שָׁמַיִם (*mo-RAʾ sha-MA-yim*) means “fear of Heaven [God].”

• מוֹרָא (*no-RAʾ*), “awful, dreadful,” an adjective from the same root as the noun מוֹרָא.

• מוֹרָל (*mo-RAL*), “morale,” an international word absorbed by modern Hebrew.

• אָמַר (*ʾa-MAR*), “he said.”

• מוֹמָר (*mu-MAR*), “apostate.” It usually refers to a Jew who has converted out of Judaism.

Note that the following two pairs of words have the same consonantal spelling. It is only their vocalization that is different:

• רָעָב (*ra-ʿEV*), “hungry.” Compare Proverbs 25:21, “If your enemy is רָעָב, give him food....”

• רָעָב (*ra-ʿAV*),

“famine.”

• רֵעַ (*RE-ʾaʿ*), “friend, companion.” This is the word usually translated “neighbor” in the biblical commandment “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18).

• רַע (*raʿ*), “bad; evil, wicked.”

• רָעוּעַ (*ra-ʿU-ʾaʿ*), “shaky, dilapidated.” This is a rabbinic word, not biblical.

• רָעַל (*RA-ʿal*), “poison.”

• רָעַשׁ (*RA-ʿash*), “noise, din; earthquake.”

• רָעָלָה (*re-ʿa-LAH*), “veil [covering a woman’s face].”

• בְּאֵר (*be-ʾER*), “[water] well.”

• שָׂרָה (*sa-RAH*), “Sarah.”

• אֵר (*ʾor*), “light” (as opposed to darkness).

• הָר (*har*), “mountain.”

• רָמָה (*ra-MAH*), “height; plateau; level, standard.”

• נֶמֶר (*na-MER*), “leopard.”

In the next lesson we will focus our attention on the peaceful word *sha-LOM*.

International Synoptic Society

The NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC is celebrating its centennial this year. In these 100 years the GEOGRAPHIC has undergone a metamorphosis from a small, technical publication into perhaps the greatest educational journal in the world.

This transformation began when Alexander Graham Bell opened the National Geographic Society's membership to laypeople. In the 19th century the privilege of supporting scientific discovery such as expeditions to distant places belonged solely to the wealthy. Bell viewed the GEOGRAPHIC as a vehicle "that would permit anyone who was interested in the world to participate, as a member of the Society, in its exploration and discovery."

We feel this is the time to form a similar society to support scholarly research into the synoptic Gospels. With this article we therefore announce the founding of the International Synoptic Society.

We believe that many of JERUSALEM PERSPECTIVE's readers are as interested as the scholars of the Jerusalem School in the exploration of Jesus' biography. You want to encourage new research projects, and be involved in the publication of the vast body of Gospel research that remains unpublished or has appeared only in technical journals.

We know that many readers of JERUSALEM PERSPECTIVE, while not able personally to specialize in the field,

nevertheless are keenly interested in this research and will contribute so that trained scholars can investigate and more fully illuminate the words and deeds of Jesus.

The International Synoptic Society will:

- Help publish the research of the Jerusalem School.
- Help distill and popularize research that thus far has been published only in technical form.
- Help support new research in the synoptic Gospels.
- Help expand JERUSALEM PERSPECTIVE, the mouthpiece of the Jerusalem School.

Annual membership in the Society will be:

Regular: US\$100 (or equivalent in other currency); Supporting: US\$300; Sponsor: US\$500; Patron: US\$1000. Lifetime membership is US\$5000. Members of the Society will receive a special membership certificate, and publications funded with dues will carry the names of contributing members. (United States members can receive a tax-deductible receipt by sending their dues via the Jerusalem School's U.S. affiliate, the Center for Judaic-Christian Studies, P.O. Box 293040, Dayton, OH.)

By becoming a member of the International Synoptic Society, you will be instrumental in helping us all to better understand the words of Jesus. Your membership dues will help expand the horizons of Gospel research, and enlarge the JERUSALEM PERSPECTIVE to more fully report on this work. **JP**

Jesus' Education

(continued from page 1)

sages, but the moral and ethical quality of their teaching is still considered more highly than that of their Judean counterparts. Such first-century Galilean sages as Johanan ben Zakkai, Hanina ben Dosa, Abba Yose Holikufri of Tiv'on, Zadok and Jesus of Nazareth helped impart a deep understanding of the Torah to the residents of Galilee.

In addition to their high level of knowledge of and reverence for Scripture, the Galileans could be seen as the religious conservatives of the period. Jewish messianic nationalism flourished in the Galilee. Judah the Galilean, for example, was the founder of the "Zealots" movement, and it was in Galilee, not Judea, that the great revolt against Rome broke out in 66 A.D.

Early Training

The New Testament says al-

most nothing about Jesus' life from after his birth until he appeared in the Temple at age twelve, and from then until he began his public ministry at about the age of thirty. Yet a good indication of what a young Jewish man in Jesus' day would have been doing may be found in Avot 5:21, a tractate from a collection of rabbinic sayings called the Mishnah, which states:

At five years of age, one is ready for the study of the Written Torah, at ten years of age for the study of the Oral Torah, at thirteen for *bar mitzvah* [the religious coming-of-age ceremony], at fifteen for the study of *halachot* [rabbinic legal decisions], at eighteen for marriage, at twenty for pursuing a vocation, at thirty for entering one's full vigor....

Although this statement cannot be dated with certainty, and may come some 100 years after the time of Jesus, there are many other passages in rabbinic works which indicate the importance placed upon the education of children and pro-

vide some insight into how the young Jesus was probably spending his time.

Certainly education was highly valued in Jewish society. In his apology for Judaism, *Against Apion*, written to counter anti-Semitism, the first-century Jewish historian Josephus states:

Above all we pride ourselves on the education of our children, and regard as the most essential task in life the observance of our laws and of the pious practices based thereupon, which we have inherited. (*Against Apion*, 60)

The Talmud even suggests the preferred class size:

The maximum number of elementary pupils that should be placed under one teacher is twenty-five; if there are fifty, an additional teacher must be provided; if there are forty, a senior student should be engaged to assist the teacher. (Bava Batra 21a)

In part two we will look at the study methods used by Jesus and his contemporaries.